GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:492
ANSWERED ON:09.05.2007
SAARC SUMMIT
Mane Smt. Nivedita;Scindia Shri Jyotiraditya Madhavrao

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the 14th SAARC Summit was held recently on April 3-4, 2007 in New Delhi;

(b) if so, the details of the issues discussed therein and the outcome thereof;

(c) the bilateral agreements signed on the occasion;

(d) whether some countries were present in the Summit as observers; and

(e) if so, the names of those countries along with their views and suggestions in the Summit;

Answer

MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE)

(a) to (e) A statement is placed on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (A) TO (C) OF LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 492 REGARDING "SAARC SUMMIT" FOR ANSWER ON 09/05/2007

The 14th SAARC Summit was held in New Delhi on April 3-4, 2007. The salient features of the deliberations of the Fourteenth SAARC Summit were:

@ For the first time in its history, SAARC expanded its membership to welcome Afghanistan as its eighth member. Again, for the first time, five Observers from outside the region − China, Japan, Republic of Korea, the United States of America and the European Union - attended the Summit. The Summit also decided to give a similar status to Iran.

@ The Summit adopted a comprehensive and a forward-looking Declaration, to promote regional co-operation. It underlined the collective vision of the Heads of State/Government of SAARC countries of an interconnected South Asia where there was a free flow of people, goods, services and ideas.

@ In terms of atmosphere, this was the smoothest, least contentious Summit ever. The constructive deliberations at various meetings of the Heads of State/Government, of the Council of Ministers and of Senior Officials and the high-level presence of Observers, including the expression of interest of others, are all testimony to the fact that this was recognised not just within the region, but also outside of it.

@ There was recognition that in its third decade of existence, there was a need to move SAARC from a declaratory to an implementation phase. The focus of SAARC would be on implementing collaborative projects that would bring concrete benefits to the people of the region. In this context, SAARC countries committed themselves to early operationalisation of the SAARC Development Fund (SDF).

@ It was agreed to improve intra-regional connectivity, particularly physical, economic and people-to-people connectivity. The full benefits of an integrated regional multi-modal transport system were recognised. It was agreed that the SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study would be extended to Afghanistan. It was also agreed that pilot projects for improving connectivity would be identified and implemented.

@ During the Summit, two important Agreements on the establishment of the South Asian University and the SAARC Food Bank were signed. The Food Bank is an exemplary model of regional cooperation to meet collectively the region's food shortages in times of emergencies and natural calamities. The South Asian University will be developed as a centre of excellence in higher education for the entire region.

@ There was full agreement that SAFTA was one of the most successful outcomes of SAARC's collective efforts. To realise its full potential, SAFTA should integrate trade in services. The importance of implementing trade facilitation measures was also underlined.

@ The SAARC countries agreed to work together on a roadmap, inter alia, in the fields of poverty alleviation, food security, energy,

water, environment, climate change, trade and transport, information and communication technology, tourism, education, culture and counter-terrorism.

@ The importance of people-to-people contact as a key constituent in regional connectivity was stressed.

@ The SAARC countries committed themselves to combat terrorism and agreed to consider India's proposal to work towards finalising an Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.